



The Implementation of School Principal Leadership in Integrating Religious Values into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1, Bengkulu City

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Received: 02-08-2025

Accepted: 14-09-2025

Published: 28-10-2025

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of school principal leadership in integrating religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1, Bengkulu City. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The research subjects consisted of the school principal, teachers, and educational staff. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that the school principal's leadership in integrating religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out through several key roles, namely as a visionary leader, educator, motivator, and role model. The principal establishes a school vision and policies that embed religious values into instructional planning, encourages teachers to internalize religious values within general subject instruction, and fosters a religious school culture through habituation activities and exemplary conduct. The integration of religious values is also reflected in the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which is aligned with Islamic values. Despite challenges such as differences in teachers' understanding and limited instructional time, the principal addresses these issues through continuous coaching, supervision, and mentoring. This study is expected to contribute to the development of school principal leadership practices in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum grounded in religious values

Keywords

School Principal Leadership, Religious Values, Merdeka Curriculum, Integrated Islamic School

Introduction

Article 31 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia mandates that national education be oriented toward faith and piety, noble character, and intellectual development. This constitutional foundation underscores the necessity of integrating religious values into all educational processes, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This mandate is also aligned with the first principle of Pancasila, Belief in the One and Only God, which emphasizes that educational practices must be grounded in religious and moral values. Education that neglects this foundation risks losing its ethical orientation and failing to develop holistic Indonesian citizens.

The Merdeka Curriculum introduces the Pancasila Student Profile, which comprises six core dimensions: faith and noble character, global diversity, independence, mutual cooperation, critical reasoning, and creativity. Among these dimensions, faith and moral integrity serve as the foundational values that inform the development of students' character, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility. Consequently, the integration of religious values within learning processes becomes essential to achieving the curriculum's overarching objectives.

Effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires strong educational leadership, particularly at the school level. School principals play a strategic role as key decision-makers responsible for translating curriculum policies into instructional practices. Leadership in education involves the ability to influence organizational goals, mobilize resources, and foster a supportive learning environment. Principals are therefore expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum and to actively facilitate the integration of religious values across subjects and learning activities.

Religious value integration within the Merdeka Curriculum is inherently feasible, as all subject areas are value-laden and interconnected with moral and spiritual dimensions. Integrating religious values supports the development of students' holistic competencies and reinforces Pancasila-based identity in accordance with national educational goals. Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with greater autonomy to design contextual and meaningful learning experiences, allowing religious values to be embedded systematically within instructional content.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires institutional adaptation, in which principal leadership becomes a determining factor. Preliminary observations at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City indicate that the school has successfully implemented the Merdeka Curriculum through an integrated Islamic learning approach, consistent with the framework of the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT). The school's leadership performance is reflected in its recognition as a provincial model school, high teacher attendance, and students' academic and non-academic achievements at local, national, and international levels.

Given the strategic role of leadership in curriculum implementation, this study aims to examine the implementation of school principal leadership in integrating religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1, Bengkulu City.

Methods

The data obtained in this study were qualitative in nature. Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative approach and was carried out concurrently with data collection. Initial analysis was applied to preliminary observations and secondary data, which served to determine and refine the research focus.

The qualitative data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data Reduction

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data derived from field notes. This process enables researchers to obtain clearer insights and facilitates subsequent data collection and retrieval when necessary (Sugiyono, 2020). In this study, the researcher selected and focused on core data obtained from direct field observations that were relevant to school principal leadership in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through the integration of religious values.

Data Display

Data display involves organizing information into a systematic and meaningful form to enhance clarity and interpretation. Data may be presented through brief descriptions, diagrams, category relationships, or flowcharts. In this study, the analyzed data were presented in the form of narrative text to describe patterns and themes emerging from the research findings.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final stage of data analysis involved drawing and verifying conclusions by developing descriptive interpretations of previously unclear phenomena. Initial conclusions were considered provisional and subject to change as additional data were collected. Conclusions were deemed credible when supported by valid and consistent evidence obtained through continuous verification during the data collection process.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Following data collection, data trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to the process of verifying data by examining it from multiple sources, using different methods, and at various points in time. This technique is employed to enhance the credibility and validity of qualitative findings by integrating multiple data collection methods and information sources (Alfansyur & Mariyani, 2020).

This study applied three types of triangulation: source triangulation, which involves comparing data obtained from different informants or documents; method triangulation, which entails cross-checking data collected through various techniques such as interviews, observations, and documentation; and time triangulation, which examines data consistency across different time periods.

Results

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation, this study found that the leadership of the school principal at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City plays a critical role in the successful integration of religious values within the Merdeka Curriculum. The principal demonstrates visionary leadership by establishing school policies and programs oriented toward strengthening religious values, both in curriculum planning and in the development of school culture. Religious values are not treated as supplementary content but are systematically embedded in instructional processes and daily school activities.

The findings further indicate that the principal actively guides and motivates teachers to integrate religious values into subject matter. Teachers are encouraged to design instructional materials that align the learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum with religious values. In addition, the principal provides exemplary role modeling through attitudes, behavior, and communication, serving as a reference for teachers and students in practicing values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and moral integrity.

The study also reveals that a conducive, religious, and innovative school climate has emerged as a result of participatory and collaborative leadership practices. Teacher collaboration is fostered through regular meetings, professional discussions, and continuous professional development activities. Instructional innovation is evident in the use of diverse methods and media, including project-based learning approaches that remain aligned with religious values and the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Moreover, the management of school facilities and administrative systems is conducted in an orderly manner and supports the integration of religious values. Worship facilities, religious learning media, and documentation of religious programs are adequately provided and optimally utilized. The principal also implements continuous supervision, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure that the integration of religious values is consistently aligned with the intended objectives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the implementation of principal leadership at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City effectively integrates religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum. This effectiveness is reflected in increased religious awareness, disciplined attitudes, and morally grounded behavior among students, teachers, and the broader school community. Principal leadership emerges as a key factor in creating synergy between policy, instructional practices, and a school culture grounded in religious values.

Discussion

The implementation of school principal leadership in integrating religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City demonstrates a strategic and comprehensive role in shaping value-based education. The findings indicate that principal leadership functions not merely at the administrative level but as instructional and moral leadership that guides curriculum implementation and school culture development.

First, the principal plays a crucial role in providing continuous guidance and direction to teachers regarding the integration of religious values across subjects. This guidance is delivered through regular meetings, informal discussions, and mentoring in lesson planning and classroom

implementation. Teachers are encouraged to understand that religious values are not confined to Islamic Religious Education but should be contextually embedded in all subjects. Such leadership practices enhance teachers' confidence and creativity in implementing student-centered and value-oriented learning, which aligns with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Second, the principal's role modeling emerges as a significant factor in strengthening the internalization of religious values. By consistently demonstrating discipline, honesty, responsibility, and ethical conduct in daily interactions and decision-making, the principal reinforces religious values through lived practice. This form of exemplary leadership supports value transmission beyond formal instruction, enabling teachers and students to internalize religious values naturally and sustainably within the school environment.

Third, effective planning and coordination further support the integration of religious values. The principal ensures that value integration is explicitly incorporated into school programs and teachers' instructional plans. Collaboration with vice principals and teachers facilitates shared understanding of educational goals and promotes consistent implementation across grade levels and subjects. This finding highlights the principal's role as a coordinator and instructional leader who aligns curriculum objectives, learning practices, and school programs.

Fourth, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation are conducted systematically to ensure that religious value integration is implemented in classroom practice rather than remaining at the level of formal documentation. Academic supervision is carried out using a humanistic and constructive approach, positioning supervision as professional support rather than control. The outcomes of supervision serve as reflective feedback for improving instructional quality, reinforcing the sustainability of value integration.

Fifth, the management of facilities and administrative systems contributes to the effectiveness of religious value integration. Adequate worship facilities, religious learning media, and well-organized administrative systems create a supportive learning environment. Such conditions enable teachers to implement integrated learning more effectively and foster a school atmosphere conducive to religious and moral development.

Sixth, the principal actively motivates teachers to collaborate and innovate. Moral support, recognition, and encouragement of professional development enhance teachers' commitment to value-based instruction. Teachers are also given autonomy to experiment with innovative methods and media, including project-based learning that remains aligned with religious values and the Merdeka Curriculum framework. This autonomy fosters instructional creativity and meaningful learning experiences.

As a cumulative outcome, principal leadership contributes to the creation of a conducive, religious, and innovative school climate. A safe, respectful, and value-oriented environment supports both teachers and students in the learning process and strengthens the internalization of religious values. This positive school climate facilitates student-centered learning and aligns with the holistic goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, the findings confirm that principal leadership has a significant influence on the successful integration of religious values within the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City. Visionary, participatory, and instructional leadership enables synergy among guidance, role modeling, planning, supervision, motivation, and school climate development. The distinct

contribution of this study lies in its focus on principal leadership within the relatively new context of the Merdeka Curriculum and its implementation in an integrated Islamic school setting, where religious values are embedded not only in religious subjects but also in general subjects, school culture, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). These findings underscore the importance of principal leadership as a key determinant in achieving curriculum goals that balance academic achievement with character formation and moral development.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study on the implementation of school principal leadership in integrating religious values into the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Iqra 1 Bengkulu City, it can be concluded that principal leadership plays a critical and strategic role in ensuring the successful integration of religious values into learning processes. The principal functions not only as a managerial leader but also as an instructional leader who provides continuous guidance, direction, and exemplary practices for teachers.

The implementation of principal leadership is reflected in sustained teacher guidance, role modeling in the application of religious values, systematic planning and coordination of learning activities, and ongoing supervision, monitoring, and evaluation. Furthermore, effective management of facilities and administration, teacher motivation, encouragement of collaboration, and support for instructional innovation collectively strengthen the integration of religious values within the Merdeka Curriculum.

Principal leadership also contributes to the creation of a conducive, religious, and innovative school climate that supports teachers in implementing student-centered and value-based learning. Therefore, this study confirms that school principal leadership has a significant influence on the successful integration of religious values within the Merdeka Curriculum, both in enhancing instructional quality and in fostering students' character development and moral integrity.

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